

Linda Clair
Meditation Retreat
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 4C – Tuesday afternoon discussion

Question: I think the head thing that I was describing before was because prior to the retreat that's how I meditated – I would focus silently on the breath through the nose. So when thoughts came and drew me away I'd come back to the silent awareness. I think I wasn't really clear on Simple Meditation process so even though I was doing belly-breath prior to the retreat, on the two-day you did in Sydney, I didn't know that was like the grounding, and that you had your awareness from here (the belly). Instead of me doing it from here I'd be aware of everything in the body. I'm used to being here in silence, so the thoughts would come – "You've got to move." And I would silently just not move, and the pain would just continue. I was wondering with the pain continuing, is that a resistance? Like what you resist persists? If you relax into it – as J. was saying, and for her the pain went – is that because she surrendered and let go of resisting the pain and then it just passed through?

Linda: It's a good question. It's a tricky one, because in most people we grow up and it's quite deeply ingrained, "Pain bad." So if there's pain we've got to do anything to get rid of it, get away from it. So when we're doing this practice – and this is really basic Zen practice, without the rituals – so the pain that you feel when you're sitting *is* resistance. But the resistance is very necessary to regulate the amount of energy that's coming into your body. So we can tend to go, "Resistance, that's bad. If only the resistance wasn't there I'd be enlightened. Everything would happen and everything would come in." But the resistance is your safety valve. It's like an electrical current; as you open up and more and more energy is coming in it does meet block of resistance in the body, and it can't get through fully, so you feel that pain. And the way through that resistance is just to sit with it, not to try and do anything in particular with it. So yes, the pain is resistance, but the resistance is very necessary because if we get too much energy coming in at once it can just put us right off balance, mentally, physically, in lots of ways.

So the resistance is a really good thing but we tend to feel, "Oh, the resistance is bad. I am resisting this process." It's not that, it's just this resistance that is necessary in the body to regulate the amount of energy coming in, and it comes and goes and it comes in different forms – pain, different forms of pain, different spots in the body. But it just means there's a lot of energy coming in and it's meeting resistance. It means that you're open. It's coming in, meeting blocks of resistance, and there's pain. And when you open your eyes, usually, the pain suddenly goes, it's not there, it's like it was never there. It doesn't always go straight away but often it does. As soon as the bell goes you open your eyes, it's gone. So it's not typical, normal, just purely physical pain. But for most people even the physical pain that they feel is not purely physical pain. A large degree of it is emotional and that makes it even more intense. So as you get into this the quality of physical pain that you do feel starts to change, because it becomes more purely physical, rather than mixed up with emotions and suffering.

Question: I've been feeling discomfort or pain but it feels like tension. The body's been really tense and it sort of comes up from the floor, and I might get what I would label as pain. But I'm wondering

about the tension in the body because the last sit the whole body was completely tense. Is that the same thing as pain?

Linda: Same thing, yes. It's the same thing so when you feel it, when you realise you're tense, it can automatically soften for a few seconds, but then after a while you'll feel it's tense again. I'd say breathe into the belly, to soften it to a degree and to also help you cope with it. But again, it's the same as pain; it's going to happen. The tension eventually dissolves, the pain eventually dissolves, and you never feel it in the same way again. It doesn't mean you don't get physical tension in your body at times, but it's really for a different reason. But eventually this emotional tension, which is the tension you've been holding for most of your life, trying to avoid, and using whatever you can to get a break from it – drugs, thinking, anything to get a break from it. When you're sitting here you're facing it and not running away from it and it's really confronting. So the way through it is not to push it, not to try and do anything with it except sit it out. This is really sitting it out. And you'll go through layers of it and suddenly the tension and the pain will go and there'll be this, "Ah, this is amazing." And then you'll start to get slightly attached to that and not want the pain to come back, and then it will come back. So eventually it does go.

So there's pleasure as well, it's not like you never feel pleasure, but the quality of the pleasure changes too. Pain and pleasure, they come a bit closer together rather than seeing them as opposites.

Question: I'm feeling quite fatigued today and it's the fatigue that I might feel ordinarily on the Thursday or Friday of a seven-day retreat. I feel like I hit the ground running on Saturday and was right in it and I've been doggedly working away at just trying to get back to my breath. You mentioned to P. about having a nap in the afternoon and I've been trying to do that. I don't really know what my question is but I wanted to talk about that, the fatigue.

Linda: Well, the fact that you're feeling it today, Tuesday, does mean that you've been working harder from the beginning. As I said to P., make sure you have a rest during the day when you can. I would say maybe take it a bit easier in the afternoons when you're sitting. Put your energy in when you've got the energy; for me that's usually the morning, not always but usually the morning. So do that and in the afternoon just tread water – don't push, don't try and extend yourself, just soften a bit, and take it a little bit easier.

Question: Yes, I guess there's been a desire to extend myself, or work a little harder. This morning for instance I wanted to sit through morning tea but something in me just said it wasn't appropriate. So I got up for ten minutes and came back. It felt right for whatever reason.

Linda: Well, do that, and if it feels right to sit through do that, but if not, don't. Don't push yourself too much, particularly if you're feeling fatigue now.

Question: I find I'm just getting through it. I feel like I'm trying to extend my energy throughout the day, sort of even it out. Is that worth doing?

Linda: Are you sleeping?

Question: Yes, pretty well.

Linda: I'd say sort of pace yourself to a degree, but you might get a second wind as well. That can really happen, often on about the fifth day, you can get this surge of energy. So when you have the energy use it, really put everything into this. And when you're feeling really fatigued just try and be with it – don't give up and let your mind wander too much – try and keep it quite even and stable. And try and have some sort of rest sometime during the day where you're lying down not doing anything in particular. But I'd say you'll probably get a second wind.

Question: I'll be expecting it. Thankyou.

Question: Is it more is better or less is better? Because we all seem to be striving – if we sit for longer we'll get somewhere quicker. Maybe it's a wrong assumption because what you're saying is, "Respond to your body." But with our minds we're so oriented to goals, therefore we think the floor is better, longer is better.

Linda: It changes with the situation, and like you said, if you're not fully in your body of course your mind is going to say, "No, you're too tired. You're going to hurt your body if you keep sitting, something is going to happen." So sometimes it *is* good if you've got the energy and the intention to go, "Okay, I'm going to challenge myself today and sit for two hours." Maybe – rather than just half an hour, ten minutes, half an hour. Other times it's good to get up and do the walking and that will energise you, so for that half-hour you can stay completely still rather than be fatigued and falling asleep. So it changes. There are no hard and fast rules.

I used to sit at times for long periods because I would get quite strong pain and after a while I started to really appreciate that and to understand what it was doing. I never enjoyed it but I could see it was forcing me to be here. But then usually in the afternoons I'd take it a bit easier. But in the mornings I'd put everything into it. So it depends. You never know. There can be some sits where you go into it feeling quite tired and they can be amazing. So you just never know, you can never assume anything. And there's no rule saying if you do this it will happen faster or whatever – it depends on your intention. So sometimes it's good to sit longer, sometimes not. You can get attached to anything so if you feel yourself getting attached to something sometimes it can be harder to just sit for half an hour and get up and do the walking than sit the whole way through.

Question: I personally sometimes get into this, "The longer is better," and pat on the back, but I can see that I should question that probably.

Linda: Sometimes it's great but other times not.

Question: I found a lot of my meditations at home are quite busy. What's interesting though is that since I've been doing this I have slowed down in my life. I do things more slowly which means I enjoy them more, which can only be a good thing. And I feel more peace. And yet my meditations are not a reflection of that change. Maybe it doesn't matter but it would sort of be nice to have more quiet meditations at times.

Linda: But maybe your meditations *are* a reflection and your life is a reflection of your meditations. Because when you're working really hard – the mind is coming in and you're still doggedly sitting there, coming back, coming back – that is a really valuable meditation, and you are going to feel the affects afterwards. But we get very used to this cause and effect thing, "If I do this I'll get immediate benefits. If I sit and watch my mind my meditations will become quieter and quieter." They

probably are to a degree but you're just noticing the mind much more. And maybe it's coming in and you're not staying in one train of thought for as long, but that means another one is going to come in. So I'd say keep up with it but don't try and expect your meditations to be quiet. Sometimes they will be but other times they won't. But you see your progress more in your daily life, and slowing down for you was a really big thing, like a huge thing, and that's what's happening. So it's working. When a deep habitual behaviour changes that's a real indication of what's happening, not so much what's happening during your sitting. You really can't gauge much by what's happening in your sitting.

Question: Yes, I sort of get that and it's not happening by the book but you're saying there's no book anyway.

Linda: Not really, that's what's so hard about it, there's no book. There's not this progression: this meditation is going to be quieter, and the next one... You just never know, you really don't know.

Question: I think what keeps me going is that I can see the progress even though if I think back about the meditation it can be quite discouraging. But I suppose it doesn't matter. Maybe one day that will change but it doesn't matter really.

Linda: It will change one day but don't wait for it. How's it been this retreat so far?

Question: Mixed bag. This morning my mind was so busy, it reminded me of my meditations at home. And I thought maybe, as you were saying to R. yesterday, maybe I'm just clearing muck. But then I had another thought that if you were clearing muck every time you're thinking you'd be well and truly enlightened by now. So I just wasn't sure whether all that thinking was a sign of anything. But apart from that I'm still struggling a little bit in my posture, trying to find something that is comfortable because I have to keep that leg straight.

Linda: Don't look for comfort when you're sitting. Everyone's body is different and everyone has the right position for their body. So you get a position, where your back is reasonably straight and you feel reasonably okay, but no position is going to be the perfect position. People try different ways and chop the legs off chairs and go, "This is going to be the perfect position." You get the *right* position for your body, and it's not going to be comfortable all the time. Everyone in any position is going to experience quite a bit, at times, of discomfort or pain or whatever, and you just have to accept that. But there is a *right* position, and once you get that it's good to stick to it and accept it's not going to be comfortable all the time. It's going to be painful sometimes and uncomfortable. So don't look for comfort, and just accept it's going to be uncomfortable quite a bit of the time.

Question: [\(Marie's posture discussion and some repetition edited out\)](#)

Linda: Eventually it is. You can just sit and there's no pain, there's no anything. But leading up to that there will be discomfort. But that's why we're here. We're not satisfied with just being comfortable. We want something else, something more extreme, more intense, more alive.

Question: When I first started with you everyone was talking about pain and I thought, "What pain? What are they talking about?" And then I realised, when you feel uncomfortable you don't move and that's part of the sadhana. So I've been doing that too. I don't know if it works – my mind is still really busy.

Linda: Well, really watch your reaction to that discomfort or pain or whatever you feel. Just stay, for half an hour, stay as still as you can. Keep everything still, your toes, everything. You're not going to injure yourself in half an hour. It can feel like that sometimes but nothing is going to be injured. And just watch that tendency to want to move, even your fingers. Your fingers are there and suddenly you realise you're moving your fingers. Keep everything completely still for half an hour, and it's a really interesting exercise, because there are relative degrees of stillness, staying still.

Question: I can see there is a mental aspect to it because sometimes I've got pain in my right knee, which is my good knee, and then I really freak out that that knee too is going to go bad. But I can see that it's just fear.

Question: You've mentioned intention a few times this retreat, which I've never really heard you speak about before.

Linda: Haven't I? I have, quite a bit.

Question: You probably have but I just haven't heard you. In my mind – I've got a feeling you're going to say no – but could I have an intention to work on something, for some emotional baggage to come up in the session? What do you think about thinking about something to stimulate...?

Linda: Nup. Don't get into it. It's very tempting to want to do that; to feel that by thinking about it, some incident or something that has been bothering you, you are going to resolve it or work it out or be free of it by thinking about it. Is that what you mean?

Question: No, I don't mean think about it, I mean before you start meditating think about it just to stir the pot. But in the meditation not to figure anything out, it's just more what's active in the body.

Linda: No, I'd say let whatever is going to come up come up. Otherwise you're sort of manipulating the whole thing. You'll have enough stuff coming up anyway so don't target certain things. Just sit and have the intention to sit there until the bell, whatever happens, and stay as still as possible. And keep coming back to your breath. So treat every thought as equally as you can. Don't feel that one is more important to think about than another; same for emotions which are just strong thoughts really, don't feel that one is more important than another. So just treat them equally – thinking as thinking – not spiritual thoughts, non-spiritual thoughts, this, that.

Question: When you say intention, what do you mean? What's an example of intention before meditation?

Linda: Well, I remember at times when I used to sit – and there was a lot going on at a certain time – I'd sit there and my intention would be to just sit there, stay there. And also at times, just take whatever was thrown at me. So I'd sit there and have no idea about what was going to happen and it would be like, "Okay, I'm going to sit here and whatever is thrown at me I'll just take, I'll just stay still and take it." And that's what would often happen. So I'd say don't try and use any sort of certain emotional thing to start off the meditation or during the meditation. There will be enough that comes up. Because in a way that's sort of choosing which emotion you want to get into as well.

It would feel sometimes to me like I was going in to battle, but I wasn't fighting. And I didn't have a shield to try and defend anything; there were no defences there. So you have to be completely vulnerable and open to whatever comes up and deal with it as best you can.

[\[Chat about seating to edit out of audio\]](#)

Question: This is something that's just happened in this retreat I think. Sometimes I'm meditating and sitting and then I just find that my eyes have opened. I'm not looking, I'm sort of staring and my attention is drawn to the trees in the background or a candle. It still feels like I'm meditating but I just wasn't sure. It's not like I'm choosing, thinking I'll open my eyes, I just suddenly notice my eyes are open and I'm still focusing on the breath. It just happened in the last day or so. Sometimes I let myself stay in that state and sometimes I close my eyes.

Linda: I would say close your eyes. I'm not exactly sure what it is but I'd say close your eyes. Because you are looking at something, you said you'd be looking at a tree, so in a way you are. But if you keep your eyes fairly much closed it will contain more energy. So it's probably a lot is happening and opening your eyes tones it down a bit.

Question: Sort of like another form of resistance.

Linda: It's just that there's a lot there and your body is having trouble coping with it, so opening your eyes dissipates a bit of energy.

Question: That's what it felt like. There's a lot going on.

Linda: Sometimes if it happens it's fine, but things like that can become a habit pretty quickly.

Question: Earlier today when you were saying emotions are just strong thoughts, and also about not repressing things, just letting things come through. In a morning sit some emotion was coming up and I was trying not to add stories to it, and was trying to breathe through it, and just let it be there for as long as it needed to be. It kept coming back a few times. Is that the way to deal with emotion, just holding it, letting it be?

Linda: Yes. I'd say just do your best with it. Sometimes if you have a little cry that's fine too. When that happens more cleansing tears than anything. Sometimes of course you're going to feel pretty sorry for yourself – that's going to happen as well. So just do that, and then when you feel revived again keep going. So just deal with it as you were saying. Sometimes you're just so firmly into it that it's really hard to get out of it. So then you just have to bide your time and it will eventually subside.

Question: When you're talking about open eyes, occasionally I have had really crazy thoughts all over the place and I have opened my eyes and looked at you, just briefly, just to remind myself I am here. Is that okay to do sometimes?

Linda: Yes. If it's overwhelming just open your eyes.

Question: I sometimes peek for longer. (Laughter.)

Linda: I haven't been opening my eyes much this retreat so I don't know what's been going on really.